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Evaluation

Evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan and global and regional programmes, 2014–2017

Executive summary

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I. Background

1. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has carried out an evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, global programme and regional programmes (2014-2017). The evaluation is part of the IEO medium-term plan (DP/2014/5) approved by the Executive Board at the first regular session of 2014. This document constitutes an executive summary of the evaluation, provided for consideration by the UNDP Executive Board at its second regular session of 2017. The main report is available at http://web.undp.org/evaluation.

2. The evaluation aims to strengthen UNDP accountability to global and national development partners; support the development of the next strategic plan; and support organizational learning. The outcomes of the Strategic Plan have been reviewed and the implementation of global, regional and country-level programming has been assessed, to ascertain whether UNDP is making progress in achieving its stated goals; and whether the Strategic Plan is serving as an effective tool for guiding UNDP programmes, projects and activities.

3. The evaluation report follows the outline of the Strategic Plan, leading with the three main areas of UNDP development work: sustainable development; governance; and resilience. Not all aspects of UNDP programming are covered. Rather, attention is paid to a select set of outputs and programmes that the evaluation team considers to be important to mention because they are especially significant, new and innovative or especially relevant to the contexts in which UNDP is operating. Gender equality and women's empowerment are cross-cutting aspects of all UNDP programming as are the efforts to foster South-South and triangular partnerships and build new partnerships, including with the private sector. The evaluation also considers the performance of UNDP under the fifth global programme and five regional programmes. Findings at the regional level have been aggregated to identify common issues. In addition, the evaluation assesses how UNDP has progressed in enhancing institutional effectiveness through various strategies during the current Strategic Plan, building on the joint assessment of institutional effectiveness conducted by IEO and the Office of Audit and Investigations in 2016.

4. While the Strategic Plan does not have an overarching theory of change, each of its seven outcomes has a theory of change that sets out intended roles and contributions, assumptions, risks and drivers of change. The evaluation sets out an aggregated theory of change to frame the results of UNDP programme support and consider approaches taken, the process of contribution and the significance of the UNDP contribution.

5. The evaluation used multiple data collection and analysis methods and took an iterative approach to gather and analyse multiple perspectives to measure UNDP performance. Evidence has been obtained and triangulated from document reviews, meta-analysis of evaluations and audits, regional and country case study missions, interviews, focus groups and surveys. The analysis covers the work of UNDP in 90 country programmes, five regional hubs and one subregional office, three global centres and the two global shared service centres (in Kuala Lumpur and Copenhagen). Approximately 1,000 development actors were interviewed and 30 countries visited across all regions.

6. During the Strategic Plan period, the IEO carried out a series of thematic evaluations, the results of which anchor this report. These include evaluations of UNDP contributions to fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals (2015); Human Development Reports (2015); the small grants programme of UNDP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (2015); protected areas management by UNDP and GEF (2015); gender equality and women's empowerment (2015); mine action (2015); anti-corruption (2016); disabilities-inclusive development (2016); and institutional effectiveness (2017). Each of these evaluations received a management response, including actions planned in response to recommendations.

7. Data from the UNDP results-based management system, the Integrated Results and Resources Framework and the Atlas enterprise resource planning system (the UNDP financial management system) have been taken into consideration. The evaluation team reviewed the midterm review of the Strategic Plan (2016) as well as country office reporting and decentralized evaluations. National development strategies and country-level publications and documents of national and international agencies have been assessed as pertinent to specific analyses.

II. Contribution to development results

Strategic planning

8. The overarching objectives of UNDP continue to be appropriate and relevant, and the organization's increasingly integrated, multifaceted approach to development challenges is well suited to, and consistent with, United Nations priorities and the needs of national partners. UNDP has taken measures to reconstitute its programme teams globally to facilitate integrated approaches to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals.

9. For 50 years, UNDP has kept a universal presence; however, the evaluation recognizes that the added value of the UNDP presence is perceived to be eroding in some middle-income countries, as country offices with limited resources struggle to maintain enough staff and make relevant contributions to development. The continued relevance of UNDP in a large majority of countries needs more appropriate programme models and funding to respond to context specificities. In middle-income countries where UNDP has found a way to maintain its relevance, country offices have focused on becoming a partner in the area of policy, with more upstream initiatives at national level producing neutral and quality knowledge products, positioning the organization as a key partner for its thought leadership, convening power and ability to introduce issues and sensitive themes into policy debate and work as a broker between government and civil society to stimulate debate, build consensus and push for change. To counterbalance, downstream initiatives are more directed towards the subnational level where capacity development is still needed.

Sustainable development

10. One important change from the previous UNDP Strategic Plan was the coupling of poverty reduction and environment into a combined area of work on sustainable development pathways, which positioned UNDP well for supporting the efforts of national partners to meet the Millennium Development Goals and prepare for the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP support to fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals was particularly relevant and effective during the several years leading up to 2015, with the roll-out of the Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Framework. Since 2015, the effort has shifted towards the broader and more extensive Sustainable Development Goals. It is too early in this process to assess the support that UNDP is providing to countries on fulfilment of the Goals, other than to note the promising work of UNDP, together with other partners in the United Nations development system, on the mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support programme, which assists countries in harmonizing the Goals with national planning priorities.

11. The overarching objective of UNDP continues to be its focus on the poorest of the poor and most marginalized around the world. Evidence suggests that UNDP has embedded a multidimensional perspective of poverty across national and global debates, creating enabling environments to help Governments to develop pro-poor policies and expanding local capacities for pro-poor policymaking and social protection. There are also concerns that UNDP sometimes settles too easily for small-scale livelihood interventions that do not scale up, and that its results and reporting frameworks are not paying sufficient attention to the sustainability of jobs created. UNDP needs to align better its resources and programming with its stated objective: supporting the poorest of the poor and most marginalized members of society, capitalizing on lessons learned to accelerate development results specifically for those left behind.

12. The evaluation concluded that UNDP is a leading United Nations provider of environmental protection support at national and local levels, which now includes services to help countries adapt to climate change, and has been a significant provider of technical support to Member States during global and regional negotiations on environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and water pollution. During this Strategic Plan period, UNDP has managed over one third of GEF projects and a similar percentage of projects under the new Green Climate Fund. UNDP is well regarded for its management of these projects, and for its efforts to establish strong partnerships and generate significant co-financing, and capacity to adapt to contextual changes during project implementation. It is through environmental services that UNDP works most directly at the community level, through its management of the GEF small grants programme. The evaluation also acknowledges UNDP achievements in assisting countries to promote greater energy efficiency and more sustainable energy production, focusing on energy development and services to poor and rural communities.

13. UNDP has a long-standing climate programme and is considered a global leader in the provision of adaptation services, as recognized by the considerable financial resources it has secured through the GEF, Green Climate Fund and other sources. The UNDP national and subnational scope of service, urban and rural development planning, governance, risk-assessment capabilities, experience managing multi-partner trust funds and decades of experience in environmental protection and disaster risk reduction and recovery work provide a platform from which to assist countries with this global development challenge.

Democratic governance

14. The evaluation found that UNDP governance support filled critical gaps in countries that face significant systemic challenges in their efforts to improve governance. Evidence indicates that UNDP is an important service provider of democratic governance and public administration support, helping to solidify peaceful and resilient State-society relations. It is the area of work where UNDP raises and expends about half of its resource (48 per cent), primarily for institutional strengthening for basic services, as well as accountability, the rule of law, electoral systems and peacebuilding. UNDP is well positioned to promote governance reform, yet it can do more to push for inclusive and accountable processes.

15. UNDP has helped to strengthen processes for more structured and transparent engagement of parliaments with government and civil society. UNDP is well positioned in providing expert electoral support to Governments and electoral management bodies. UNDP advocated for more credible and inclusive electoral processes, more representative parliaments with stronger legislative and oversight functions and increased citizen voice, and how to localize Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels). UNDP continues to be a global leader in the provision of parliamentary support with an increasing number of countries assisted and an enhanced focus on issue-based approaches. There have been improvements in parliamentary strategies and the capacities of parliamentary staff in areas such as legal drafting, oversight and institutionalized mechanisms for public hearings. UNDP is perceived as a reliable intermediary and neutral convener, which is crucial for engagement on democratic governance issues. UNDP does not always leverage this comparative advantage, which reduced its overall contribution to strengthening electoral systems.

16. The evaluation notes achievements in areas such as anti-corruption, open governance and facilitating local-level access to public information, particularly initiatives that facilitated citizens' utilization of information to engage in local planning and governance. UNDP contributed to enhancing the role of citizens and community-based organizations in local development planning, giving voice to the needs of women and children, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups. The evaluation also identifies specific areas where UNDP plays a direct role in government services, such as the provision of financial and operational management support for health-care systems through the Global

Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. UNDP efforts to secure the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have placed it at the forefront of core government capacity development efforts.

17. The evaluation calls attention to the work of UNDP to help Governments improve their civil service processes, especially in countries that have been in crisis, yet concerns are raised that UNDP programming often results in a parallel system of government staff paid through UNDP, and therefore outside of the national civil service, which risks undermining civil service reform efforts and government accountability. It is consequently recommended that in its programming requirements, UNDP ensure that capacity-related programming does not carry over from phase to phase without evidence of increasing government capacity and national ownership. UNDP should not undermine national civil services through long-term, off-budget advisory support.

18. UNDP has carved out a vital role in governance support to countries affected by conflict. UNDP contributions across areas of governance in peacebuilding and State-building support have been substantial in the provision of specialist technical expertise along with human resource support to government institutions. UNDP has, to its credit and that of partner Governments, sought to address the most intractable structural causes of conflict. UNDP played a leading role in enhancing the role of youth in peace and security processes, particularly the implementation of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015). UNDP support in countries affected by conflict has been crucial for the functioning of core governance institutions and consolidating stability and peace while transitioning to development. The UNDP strategy to address pressing capacity issues in the early phase of institutional formation has been appropriate in countries affected by conflict. During the initial stages of State-building, UNDP has played a crucial role, serving as a fiduciary (and procurement) manager in the absence of government capacity. As Governments in countries affected by conflict have weak financial management systems, UNDP procurement and service delivery support has helped to minimize misuse of development funds.

19. The UNDP contributions to justice sector reforms have been important enablers of capacities to allow justice institutions to function. Typical of countries affected by conflict, the low human resource base and lack of basic infrastructure are challenges. The convening role that UNDP has played in gathering diverse justice stakeholders around common reform themes and strategic planning is significant. UNDP has effectively advocated and supported anti-discrimination legislation and issues in some countries that have improved the situation for ethnic minorities, persons living with a disability or with HIV and AIDS, and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender persons. Enhancing citizen security has been an important component of UNDP rule of law initiatives, including for community-oriented policing and the reduction of illicit arms in countries affected by conflict. Improved capacities of government institutions helped strengthen the legitimacy of the State and enabled better service delivery.

20. The evaluation recognizes that UNDP during this plan period has made a concerted effort to work more collaboratively with Security Council-mandated peacekeeping missions, thereby bringing a more developmental approach to joint peacebuilding and State-building efforts and smoothing post-mission transitions.

Resilience

21. UNDP is the preferred agency for many nations seeking redevelopment support when conflict and disaster occur. It is the space where UNDP has significant latitude to support major changes in national development policy, and where nations look to UNDP for advice on how to build back better.

22. UNDP continues to play an important role both in crisis risk reduction and recovery. In the case of risk reduction, the evaluation concludes that funding remains a stumbling block, which is not unique to UNDP but is an issue for most organizations working in this area. Nevertheless, UNDP is considered a valued partner in risk reduction and its contributions have been important to quantifying and ranking risks and to preparedness. Disaster risk

reduction is an area that has important synergies with the rapidly expanding UNDP climate change adaptation support to countries.

23. The evaluation confirms the UNDP Crisis Response Unit has been effective at deploying staff and consultant resources, and at quickly releasing initial funding to get recovery programmes moving. There is continued logic and value to the UNDP contribution as the chair of the Early Recovery Cluster. UNDP is working collaboratively with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Refugees and other humanitarian agencies in response to crises such as the Syrian crisis, where human migrations overwhelm municipal services in host communities. The evaluation identifies "cash for work" programmes as interventions that often receive too much attention in early recovery engagements, at the expense of planning and coordination support where UNDP is especially needed. Furthermore, the mechanisms in place for quick response to crisis are less suitable to slow-onset crises, requiring UNDP to consider new systems and methods.

24. UNDP work in resilience has evolved and been restructured during this plan period. The evaluation found that the institutional restructuring that occurred dissolved a well-recognized and integrated crisis prevention and recovery bureau. While there were compelling reasons behind consolidating policy functions and merging the two global policy bureaux, for instance to reduce programmatic overlap and redundancy, this move disrupted UNDP service offerings in the risk reduction and recovery space, and in the process, UNDP lost talent and experience that is yet to be recovered.

25. How UNDP addresses resilience in the future is under discussion as the next strategic plan is being drafted. It will be very useful for UNDP to retain resilience as a distinct area of work under the plan, so that stakeholders see this remain a core area of the UNDP service offering. It will be important for UNDP to revisit its restructuring of the policy bureaux as the current set-up should be weighed against the advantages of having a dedicated support system in place to respond comprehensively to crisis risk reduction and recovery needs.

Financial aspects of UNDP programming during the period of the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017

26. During the Strategic Plan period, UNDP has spent a little over $12 billion on programmes, out of a total budget of $14.9 billion. The two current main areas of UNDP focus, sustainable development pathways and governance for peaceful and inclusive societies, show a decline in programme expenditure, while resilience and recovery expenditures increased over the same period.

27. Regular resources comprised about 10 per cent of development programme expenditure in the period 2014–2016. These resources, sometimes referred to as "core funds", are contributions provided to UNDP that are pooled and untied. Since 2014, there has been an 18 per cent decline in the amount of core funding expended, continuing a downward trend during the decade. This decline has wide implications for the organization and has led to a robust effort to identify new sources of revenue. Other resources (non-core) funding of approximately $4billion in expenditures each year, are provided by a wide array of donors for specific programming. These expenditures declined in 2016, although this cannot be considered a trend.

28. In the sustainable development pathways programme area, programme expenditures have been divided relatively equally between outputs linked to poverty and livelihoods programmes and those linked to environment, climate change and energy. Programmes targeting structural transformation of productive capacities and sustainable management of natural resources were the largest output areas.

29. In the governance for peaceful and inclusive societies area, one third of UNDP expenditures (34 per cent) was spent on programmes focusing on the rule of law and security sector. A large portion of it, however, was linked to citizen security programmes in Afghanistan. The second largest output area was for service delivery, especially strengthening capacities for service delivery at the subnational/local level. HIV/AIDS programmes were the

third largest group (23 per cent), mostly programmes funded by the Global Fund in Africa. Lastly, programmes focusing on State-building represented 13 per cent of total spending in this thematic area. Almost one half of the expenditures focused on institutional strengthening in countries affected by conflict.

30. In the resilience area, 58 per cent of expenditures went to early recovery programmes, a large part of which was spent on the output area of early economic revitalization. The Arab States region accounted for the largest share of these expenditures. The remaining 42 per cent of expenditures for resilience were focused on peacebuilding and disaster risk management. Expenditures are increasingly focused on the Arab States, with growing programmes in Iraq, Lebanon, State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Cross-cutting programmatic issues

31. The Strategic Plan sets expectations for UNDP work on gender and women's empowerment, as well as various partnerships, including South-South cooperation.

32. Regarding gender, the evaluation concludes that there have been incremental improvements in the UNDP gender equality and women's empowerment policy, institutional measures and programming during this period, and that UNDP work at the global and regional levels takes a strong analytical approach, seeking to identify gaps and good practices to inform gender-related policy and advocacy. UNDP has supported the improvement of economic opportunities for women, helping to usher in upstream policy reforms and downstream microcredit schemes and employment opportunities. Democratic governance programme support has demonstrated strong gender-inclusive approaches.

33. The evaluation notes some weaknesses in efforts focused on gender equality and women's empowerment. There have been limitations in the implementation of the UNDP gender equality strategy, both in terms of providing resources to support gender programming and in mainstreaming gender equality across UNDP programme areas. New management processes and mechanisms, corporate accountability and improvements in the gender architecture, such as locating experts in regional hubs and multidisciplinary focal teams in country offices, have yet to lead to meaningful improvements in gender programming and mainstreaming. The current level of support to gender-responsive crisis risk reduction and response efforts is insufficient. There is also a need for closer arrangements and clearer expectations regarding UNDP cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). UNDP should strengthen implementation of its gender policies, take measures to ensure adequate funding to mainstream gender across all programming areas and not confine gender-related work to a gender team.

34. UNDP has clarified its corporate structure and defined more precisely its operational approaches to South-South and triangular cooperation through the Strategic Plan. The recently adopted South-South and triangular cooperation strategy has the potential to provide improved direction to manage and facilitate South-South knowledge exchange at the country level. Challenges remain in the mainstreaming of South-South cooperation in UNDP country-level programming, and UNDP has yet to prioritize thematic areas where South-South exchanges will be pursued more systematically. The report draws attention to the need to improve knowledge management on South-South cooperation, especially drawing lessons that UNDP country offices can use to expand such partnerships. The UNDP role as administrative agent for the United Nations Office for South-South cooperation is acknowledged in this report, along with recent improvements made to the office's planning and management.

35. The evaluation recognizes that achieving the ambitious targets in the Strategic Plan requires robust funding as well as programmatic partnerships. A challenge to expanding partnerships is the lack of a nuanced strategy for developing new long-term partnerships and non-traditional funding mechanisms, although the report acknowledges pilot efforts underway to test innovative mechanisms such as impact investment and crowd-sourcing. UNDP has

been engaging with the private sector, especially through environmental programming, as well as livelihoods and social protection, and has established due diligence procedures to safeguard these efforts. The evaluation concludes that further engagement with the private sector can leverage significant new funding, including through large corporate social responsibility initiatives. UNDP will need to assess these opportunities against their financial and reputational risks.

36. UNDP partnerships with other United Nations agencies continue to expand, with examples of effective multi-agency partnerships including the Spanish Millennium Development Goal Fund and the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Results from "Delivering as One" pilot countries and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process suggest that more work is needed to harmonize systems before joint programming can be done routinely, effectively and efficiently. UNDP joint programming with its two affiliated organizations, the United Nations Volunteers programme and United Nations Capital Development Fund, have grown, with positive results. Finally, UNDP partnerships with environmental and health system "vertical" funds have been mutually advantageous.

Global and regional programmes

37. The evaluation analysed the contribution of the fifth global programme and the five regional programmes. With respect to the global programme, the evaluation notes that it fulfils the function of supporting staff positions at UNDP headquarters and the regional hubs that are essential for policy support to UNDP programmes, particularly country offices. The contributions of the policy and technical staff enabled UNDP global advocacy and thought leadership to government partners in the run-up to pivotal international agreements including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The report recommends that UNDP change the global programme into a service line for supporting staff positions at global and regional levels.

38. The global programme supports six global policy centres, which were established at different points of time in the past decade. The centres provide research support, organize technical workshops and enable UNDP to leverage partnerships for global policy engagement. There is greater potential for the global policy centres to facilitate knowledge exchange across the organization and to support UNDP in its global policy and advocacy roles.

39. With respect to regional programming, progress has been made in developing a coherent regional response in the five regions and consolidating policy support. The diversity of country offices' programme support requirements is too wide and specialized, and funding constraints have meant that regional hubs have had to make hard staffing choices that leave advisory gaps.

40. The regional programmes have made special efforts to support new approaches to development solutions. The evaluation finds that innovative techniques to meet development needs have been launched in many regions, including new ways to capture and utilize knowledge. Challenges remain in the application of knowledge and lessons for improved programming, and additional efforts are needed to more systematically promote innovation and knowledge management at the regional level.

41. Regional programming is an important asset for engaging countries on sensitive issues, such as anti-corruption and citizen voice, although care is needed to avoid overlap between regional and country-level programing. While regional programmes enabled country offices to pursue issues that could be sensitive for them to initiate, the lack of a regional dimension limited these initiatives in many cases. Cross-border initiatives are valuable additions to regional programmes, but such efforts need further consolidation. Too many country-related activities have diluted the regional focus.

42. Regional programmes successfully fostered strategic partnerships with new agreements and funding. The regional programme for Africa has had a clear regional orientation, focused

on strengthening the capacities of regional intergovernmental institutions, building regional normative frameworks and fostering knowledge management. In the Asia and Pacific region, while not all areas that are priorities for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation match those of UNDP, there has been engagement on mutually reinforcing development agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP is also expanding its partnerships with regional institutions elsewhere, such as with the League of Arab States. A strength of the regional programmes is their emphasis on subregional priorities and specific measures to support them.

43. The evaluation notes that although the regional programme model is an effective modality and UNDP is well positioned to play a convening role at the regional level on development issues, the UNDP organizational restructuring posed additional challenges to the achievement of results.

Institutional effectiveness

44. The Strategic Plan sets out expectations for higher-quality programming; greater organizational openness, agility and adaptability to harness knowledge, solutions and expertise; and improved management of human and financial resources. The evaluation reports on achievements in these areas, building also from a recent joint assessment on institutional effectiveness conducted by IEO and OAI.

45. Evidence suggests there are signs of improvement at UNDP in terms of higher-quality programming, openness, agility and adaptability, but these have had limited impact on harnessing knowledge, solutions and expertise to improve results and institutional effectiveness, as envisaged in the Strategic Plan. To better promote a results culture, UNDP leadership should encourage an environment that welcomes critical reflection and continuous organizational learning for improved results and institutional effectiveness. Investment in results-based management and knowledge management should be prioritized. Beyond reporting for compliance and capturing best practices, the focus should be on using lessons learned to harness knowledge, solutions and expertise to improve results and effectiveness. In building this culture, UNDP should also improve transparency and communication at the most senior levels of the organization, to encourage and improve openness and engagement.

46. With respect to human resources management, the evaluation considers that the Office of Human Resources is limited in its ability to contribute effectively to institutional effectiveness, as it is not part of formal high-level decision-making structures and as such cannot make sufficient and timely input into corporate strategic and budgetary decisions which may affect country office results. UNDP should increase the involvement of the Office of Human Resources in strategic decision-making, especially in future institutional restructuring. Given the increasing complexity of programme delivery, inter-agency work and collaboration with a range of partners including civil society, investment in developing skills in leadership and management across complex systems should be prioritized.

47. Although UNDP is now a leaner and more cost-conscious organization, there has been insufficient progress on results-based budgeting, and the organization's financial sustainability is challenged by diminishing regular resources, inadequate funding models and exchange rate losses. UNDP should transition from political budgeting to a more risk- and results-based budgeting process, so that results are more effectively linked to resources to help mobilize funds and better highlight investment gaps to donors. UNDP should also work with funders and influence groups to raise understanding of the unintended effects of reductions in core funding. UNDP is being held accountable to a corporate strategic plan without predictable and adequate resources. Focus should be on bringing the donor community together to work more effectively on multidimensional integrated approaches to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, while contributing to partner country priorities.

III. Conclusions

Conclusion 1

48. The current Strategic Plan builds on previous plans to narrow the UNDP development mandate while maintaining flexibility to adjust to local needs. The integrated approach taken is well suited to the overarching objectives of UNDP and consistent with United Nations priorities. It enables the organization to provide a multifaceted response to development support requests from national partners.

Conclusion 2

49. The presence of UNDP in middle-income countries remains relevant but is increasingly challenged by diminishing regular resources. This financial reality stretches the sometimes tenuous connection between the long-term strategic aims of UNDP and its programme expectations, calling into question the relevance of the Strategic Plan in some contexts.

Conclusion 3

50. UNDP played a positive supporting role to Governments in fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, with particular value during the later stages, helping countries accelerate their efforts as the 2015 deadline loomed. UNDP is now broadening this assistance to integrate and prioritize the Sustainable Development Goals into national development planning.

Conclusion 4

51. UNDP has made a difference by embedding a multidimensional perspective of poverty in national and global debates: creating enabling environments to help Governments develop pro-poor policies; and expanding local capacities for pro-poor policymaking. UNDP has in some cases settled too easily for small-scale livelihood interventions that do not scale up and may be more suitable for other actors.

Conclusion 5

52. UNDP has continued to enhance its standing as a country-level implementer of a range of environmental programmes, including on climate change, biodiversity loss, water pollution, land degradation and the control of persistent organic pollutants. UNDP has a long-standing climate programme and is considered a global leader in the provision of adaptation services, as recognized by the considerable financial resources it has secured through the GEF, Green Climate Fund and other sources.

Conclusion 6

53. UNDP contributed to strengthening institutions and reform processes, including by filling critical gaps in countries facing significant systemic challenges in public administration, service delivery and democratic governance. Banking on incremental approaches and cumulative impacts did not always enable a sustained increase in governance capacities.

Conclusion 7

54. UNDP has successfully established its niche as a trusted and reliable intermediary and neutral convener on democratic governance issues. UNDP appears reluctant at times to take advantage of its trusted position and push for more inclusive and accountable government processes. By taking an overly cautious approach, UNDP risks missing opportunities to trigger significant governance reforms. In delivering governance assistance and capacity-building, the issue of norms and the UNDP role in upholding them needs to be addressed.

Conclusion 8:

55. In countries affected by conflict, UNDP specialist technical expertise and human resource support has enabled core governance institutions to function, which is critical for consolidating stability and peace and transitioning to development. More sustained efforts are needed to support sector-specific capacity-development strategies and a systematic approach to strengthening core institutional capacities.

Conclusion 9

56. UNDP has made a concerted effort to work more collaboratively with peacekeeping missions mandated by the Security Council. This brings a more developmental approach to joint peacebuilding and State-building efforts, helping to smooth post-mission transitions.

Conclusion 10

57. In the early stages of crisis recovery, UNDP capacity-building support has helped to stabilize national institutions by working successfully with government partners to address immediate needs. Yet funding and operational constraints often limit progress during the longer transitional phase back to peaceful development, impeding national efforts to address the structural causes of conflict.

Conclusion 11

58. Structural changes involving establishment of a single global policy bureau for policy and programme support and a small, free-standing crisis response unit have weakened the programme coherence of UNDP and its service offering on crisis risk reduction and recovery.

Conclusion 12

59. UNDP is providing valuable services to national partners on disaster risk reduction strategies, and is especially well positioned to develop contextual analyses at the country level. Funding support for risk reduction remains weak.

Conclusion 13

60. UNDP is considered an especially valued partner in the aftermath of conflicts and disasters, as countries look to recover and rebuild. It has increased the pace and quality of its early recovery and transitional development services. Yet the organization remains ad hoc in its response to crises and focuses too much effort on short-term employment creation and cash assistance programming. This diverts attention from the more complex but critical planning and governance-related aspects of recovery where UNDP support is especially needed.

Conclusion 14

61. UNDP has more effectively organized and promoted its work on gender equality and women's empowerment, but faces continuing challenges in mainstreaming this work across the organization and meeting relevant corporate financial and results targets.

Conclusion 15

62. UNDP has strengthened its commitment to South-South cooperation through the development of a corporate strategy and continued administrative support to the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation. There remains a lack of prioritization and systematic use of South-South and triangular cooperation, and limited sharing of knowledge.

Conclusion 16

63. The global programme fulfils an important policy support function and has enabled UNDP to maintain intellectual engagement in the global development arena by participating in major international events and channeling country-level lessons to global agreements. The programme's results framework and indicators are excessive in their expectations, which cover the breadth of UNDP work under the Strategic Plan, including country-level results. The global programme is more a funding line to support staff positions for achieving corporate-wide results than a distinct global programme.

Conclusion 17

64. Progress has been made in developing a coherent regional response across the five regional programmes. To differing degrees, each of the regional programmes has expanded support for new approaches and innovative solutions and promoted subregional programming. The potential of the regional programmes to facilitate a holistic response to regional engagement and country office support is not fully realized. Although the regional programme model is an effective modality to support regional initiatives, it is constrained by its large scope. In some regions there remain too many country-related activities that overlap

with country office programming. Further attention is needed for regional public goods and services and management of cross-border externalities.

Conclusion 18

65. There are signs that UNDP is improving both the quality of its programming and its openness, agility and adaptability. But these have had limited impact on harnessing knowledge, solutions and expertise due to insufficient investment in results-based management and knowledge management and an excessive focus on compliance rather than organizational learning.

Conclusion 19

66. The Office of Human Resources is limited in its ability to contribute effectively to institutional effectiveness, as it is not part of formal high-level decision-making structures and as such cannot make sufficient and timely input into corporate-level strategic and budgetary decisions that may affect country office results.

Conclusion 20

67. The financial sustainability of UNDP is challenged by declining resources that are mostly tied to specific funder objectives, inadequate funding models and exchange rate losses. This situation makes it increasingly difficult for UNDP to work in an integrated fashion, break down silos and align projects to the priorities of the Strategic Plan. Although UNDP is now a leaner and more cost-conscious organization, additional and more effective clustering of operational functions could have further lowered UNDP transaction costs and generated further efficiencies and economies of scale. UNDP has made insufficient progress on results-based budgeting, and does not effectively cost solutions or assess programmatic value for money.

IV. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

68. Support for fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals should be a cross-cutting issue for all UNDP country offices. Integrated approaches to development are essential for fulfilment of the Goals and should be pursued where possible, taking national contexts and implementation efficiency into consideration.

Recommendation 2

69. The overarching strategic objective of UNDP — supporting the poorest of the poor and the most marginalized members of society — remains valid. Future resources and programming should aim to help countries accelerate the achievement of development results especially for those left behind, based on fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendation 3

70. UNDP should retain its global reach. Programming in middle-income countries should align with the Sustainable Development Goals and other global frameworks, placing vulnerable populations at the forefront while seizing opportunities to expand assistance at subnational levels.

Recommendation 4

71. UNDP should strongly emphasize its climate change adaptation capabilities and services in the next strategic plan. The UNDP national and subnational scope of service, capabilities for urban and rural development planning, governance and risk assessment, experience managing multi-partner trust funds and decades of environmental protection and disaster risk reduction and recovery work provide a platform from which to ably assist national and subnational governments to meet this global development challenge. Specific attention should be paid to the climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction linkages.

Recommendation 5

72. Recognizing that governance is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP should be proactive in supporting sectoral governance approaches and more persuasive in promoting democratic governance reforms.

Recommendation 6

73. Analysis of institutional capacities at the national level should guide UNDP governance programming in countries affected by conflict. Governance support needs to be targeted to critical government functions that are essential to stability. UNDP should more strategically support Sustainable Development Goal 16 and related intergovernmental agreements on peacebuilding and State-building.

Recommendation 7

74. UNDP should retain resilience as a distinct area of work under the next strategic plan so that stakeholders see this remaining a core area of the UNDP service offering. To strengthen the coherence of its crisis risk-reduction and recovery support, UNDP should continue to refine the roles and scope of service of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and the Crisis Response Unit.

Recommendation 8

75. UNDP should strengthen implementation of its gender policies, taking measures to ensure adequate funding to mainstream gender across all programming areas. Work on gender equality and women's empowerment should not be confined to a gender team alone but should ensure that all large programmes have dedicated gender expertise. Specific attention needs to be paid to such areas as environment, energy and crisis response, where gender mainstreaming remains weak.

Recommendation 9

76. UNDP should take a more systematic approach to South-South cooperation, selecting specific areas and partners for expanded cooperation.

Recommendation 10

77. UNDP should change the global programme to a service line for supporting staff positions at global and regional levels, as its shared deliverables and blurred boundaries make it unsuitable as a specific programme.

Recommendation 11

78. UNDP should determine specialties within its sustainable development, governance and resilience areas of work. This will help it to build world-class technical expertise and focus its resources on building capacities in those areas.

Recommendation 12

79. UNDP should reassess the roles and financial sustainability of the regional hubs, striving to make them centres of excellence for innovation and learning while expanding cooperation and partnerships with regional institutions. It should reduce overlap between regional and country-level programming.

Recommendation 13

80. Regional programming, if better defined, has the potential to be a valuable tool to prioritize and organize UNDP regional engagement and support to country offices. UNDP should develop its regional programmes as frameworks, outlining the regional issues to be addressed and approaches to be followed. To maximize its activities at the regional level and position UNDP to make a meaningful contribution, there should be more focus on a select number of areas at the regional level. For regional programmes to be effective, the activities that are considered should be realistic and pay sufficient attention to regionality principles.

Recommendation 14

81. UNDP should promote a results culture that encourages critical reflection and continuous organizational learning for improved results and institutional effectiveness.

Recommendation 15

82. UNDP should increase the involvement of the Office of Human Resources in strategic decision-making, especially in future institutional restructuring. Given the increasing complexity of programme delivery, inter-agency work and collaboration with a range of partners including civil society, investment in developing skills in leadership, relationship management and management across complex systems should be prioritized.

Recommendation 16

83. UNDP should transition from political budgeting to a more risk- and results-based budgeting process, to more effectively link results to resources. This will help mobilize funds and better highlight investment gaps to donors. UNDP is being held accountable to a corporate strategic plan without predictable and adequate resources. UNDP should work with funders and influence groups to raise understanding of the unintended effects of reductions in core funding. Focus should be on bringing the donor community together to work more effectively on integrated multidimensional approaches to support fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, while contributing to partner country priorities.